

*Come, thou long expected Jesus, come in Spirit, come in Truth;  
come in Word, come in Bread and Wine; Come now, we pray. Amen.*

Two weeks in a row, we get “gloom and doom” from our Gospel readings.  
Come on, Jesus! Where’s the good news?

If we want to be frightened, we can watch the news, right?  
It seems like the world keeps getting scarier. But for millions of people  
it’s been this scary for years. It’s just hit closer to us recently.

Fear was omnipresent in the culture in which Jesus lived –  
the Roman empire was as bad as any of our terrors in its brutality.  
Those to whom Jesus was speaking, and those for whom these gospels were  
written, wouldn’t see these readings as scary – they were even comforting.  
How we see always depends on where we’re looking.  
There is always something to fear, because the world is always crashing down  
around someone’s ears ... but there is also always more to the story.

Because we are living in God’s story. That is the great claim of Christian faith.  
The story we are in the middle of is much greater and longer than we can imagine.  
God’s story is a story of rebuilding, of reclaiming, restoring and renewing  
all of creation to wholeness in Christ.  
When I remember that, I live in a story of Love, not a story of Fear.  
Being ready as Jesus tells us to means tuning ourselves to detect the  
Story of Love that runs alongside the Fear, to learn the song God is singing  
so that we can sing this new world of God’s into being.

Let me tell you the story of a boy for whom his world ended a few times.  
Maybe it ended when a brother was shot by gangs in El Salvador.  
Maybe it ended his family took the huge risk of trying to send him to the U.S.  
and he said goodbye to his home and loved ones. Let’s call him Eduardo.  
I actually know nothing about this boy, but he was then one of thousands  
of unaccompanied minors in detention centers around the U.S.  
His story intersected with my sister’s story a few years ago.  
At her church they did a Christmas Giving Tree and collected gifts for the  
unaccompanied minors at a local holding facility.  
As she looked at the tags of gift requests, one caught her eye: Flute. Age: 14.

A flute is kind of a high-ticket item for a Giving Tree... but what 14-year-old boy asks for a flute? She thought, "Maybe I can make this happen for him..."

As she began to research she learned there are many kinds of flutes.

Learner flutes are different from regular flutes or concert flutes...

did this boy already play? She got in touch with the social worker at the Center.

"I noticed that one too," she said, "And thought about pulling it because it would be so expensive... but then I thought, "What kind of 14-year-old boy asks for a flute? Maybe we can make this happen for him..."

Turns out Eduardo had always wanted to learn to play the flute.

So my sister began looking for a beginner's flute on Craig's List and lo and behold, someone nearby was selling his daughter's beginner's flute for \$75.

A \$500 flute, much higher quality than many of the used ones she saw going for \$200 or \$250, for \$75. She drove over and bought it – and with it came a bunch of beginner's music books. Eduardo would learn to play the flute.

In the midst of isolation, fear and despair, God's song comes through – in a flute.

The night Jesus was born was a night of chaos, fear and pain,

as a homeless couple far from their native city were forced to find a meager shelter because the woman was giving birth.

And through that night of chaos, fear and pain; through the lowing of cattle and baaing of sheep and wails of a woman in labor came a new sound: the first cry of an infant boy.

In the midst of destruction and despair, God's song came through in the cry of a newborn, singing a new world into being.

It is that little baby's coming that we anticipate in the season of Advent, that grown man's power and love and sacrifice we celebrate every Sunday.

It is his coming that we are to be ready for.

The word Advent means "coming on," and it invites us to anticipate the coming of God – at Christmas, at the end of the ages, and all the time.

Advent invites us to be ready, to prepare for a future we cannot see, but which we believe by faith is the ultimate good.

I knew a woman named Maria, an HR executive, who was diagnosed with lymphoma. She was terrified – her world was coming to an end.

But she could see a new one.

While she was going through chemo, she got a voice coach and started to sing.

She started to write songs about what she was going through,  
and then developed a one-woman show called “Singing My Way Through It.”  
She was not much of a singer, but what a beautiful spirit.  
She was singing in her new world.

On Friday I listened to an interview with Joan Baez, who is now 83 and iconic in  
so many ways, but not least for being the voice of a generation of protest.  
It is she who sang “We Shall Overcome” next to Martin Luther King Jr. at the  
March on Washington. “We shall overcome, we are not afraid.”  
She was singing a New World into being, and so many people joined that song.  
This interview took place a few weeks ago, and she spoke of what it feels like to  
see so many of the gains of that New World being rolled back and us entering  
into a darker time again.

But she knows what it means to sing a movement into being, to sing a new world  
into being. Spontaneously in the interview she sang “Wade in the Water,”  
her voice many octaves lower than that sweet soprano that woke up the world,  
but still powerful. “Wade in the water; God’s-a-gonna trouble the waters.”

We know that song. We know how to sing new worlds into being.  
In fact, we are called to do that. We are gifted to do that. We have to do that.  
Being alert, being awake, being ready for God’s coming means being open  
to God’s appearing in all kinds of places and people and situations, even now.  
Being alert, being awake, being ready for God’s coming means having our  
inner ears tuned to God’s song of new birth,  
in a 14-year-old refugee with a flute,  
in a middle-aged cancer survivor with a voice,  
in an elderly icon still singing songs of freedom,  
in a newborn squalling in a manger.

Even in the midst of destruction and despair, God’s song of new life comes in.  
Especially in the midst of destruction and despair, God’s song of love comes in.  
Do you hear it? Can someone hear it through you?

It’s time we sang the freedom songs again, my friends.  
It’s time we joined God in singing in the new world.

**Amen.**

**Luke 21:25-36**

Jesus said, "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

"Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

**1 Thessalonians 3:9-13**

How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith.

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

**Jeremiah 33:14-16**

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."